



FACT SHEET

Module 15 Sharing the Road with Motorcycles

Each year, May is designated Motorcycle Safety Awareness month by most states and motorcycle organizations. A variety of activities are used to promote the importance of motorist awareness and sharing the road with motorcyclists.

Over two-thirds of fatal motorcycle crashes involve a motorcycle and another vehicle. The motorist either does not see the oncoming motorcycle or does not see the motorcycle in time to avoid a crash. It is important for motorists to know that their actions affect the safety of motorcyclists.

Traffic, weather, and road conditions require motorcyclists to react differently than vehicle drivers. A motorist and a motorcyclist may take different actions for the same driving or highway situation. For example, a motorist may ignore a piece of road debris; however, that same piece of road debris may be deadly for a motorcyclist.

Motorcycles are small vehicles that accelerate quickly. A motorcyclist is exposed to the elements and is offered little protection should a collision occur. To stop a motorcycle, the motorcyclist must operate separate brakes for the front and rear wheels with a brake pedal on the right side of the motorcycle. A motorcyclist must coordinate the right hand throttle, left hand clutch, and left gearshift lever to accelerate smoothly. Unlike four-wheel vehicles, a motorcycle must balance a motorcycle when it is not moving.



Why Don't Drivers See Motorcyclists?

There are several reasons why drivers may not see the motorcyclist coming: drivers tend to look for other cars, not for motorcyclists. The profile of a motorcycle is much smaller than the profile of larger vehicles. Motorcycle riding requires frequent lane movements to adjust to changing road conditions.

Where are collisions with motorcyclists more likely to occur?

Accidents are most likely to occur in these high-risk situations:

- **Left Turns**—The most common accident between cars and motorcyclists is at an intersection when the automobile driver is making a left turn in front of a motorcycle.
- **Car's Blind Spot**—Motorcyclists riding alongside a lane of cars are often out of the view of the driver. An unsuspecting driver may collide with a motorcyclist as the driver tries to change lanes.
- **Hazardous Road Conditions**—Motorcyclists have to be much more concerned about road obstructions such as potholes and fallen tree limbs. Railroad tracks may be minor problems for drivers, but a motorcyclist needs to cross them at a 90 degree angle.
- **Weather Conditions**—When the road surface is wet or icy, motorcyclists' braking and handling abilities can be affected.
- **Strong Winds**—A strong gust of wind can move a motorcycle across an entire lane if the rider isn't prepared for it. Wind gusts from large trucks in the other lane can be a real hazard.
- **Large Vehicles**—A large vehicle such as a van, bus, or truck can create a blocked line of sight and hide the motorcycle from a driver's view.

Develop these good habits and knowledge about sharing the road with motorcyclists:

- Recognize it is difficult for drivers to judge how fast a motorcycle is going.
- Expect to see motorcycles in traffic at any time, not just in the spring and summer.
- Motorcycles may be forced from their position on the road by strong winds or a rough road surface.
- Turn signals are not self-canceling on most motorcycles. Before you make a lane change or turn that depends on what a motorcycle's path is, be sure you know what a motorcyclist is doing.
- Watch for clues, such as operators or passengers turning their heads to look behind, or operators beginning to lean their motorcycles.
- If you are coming up behind a motorcycle, slow down sooner than you would for another vehicle. Leave plenty of space.
- When your vehicle is being passed by a motorcycle, you should maintain your lane position and speed. Allow the motorcycle to complete the maneuver and assume proper lane position as quickly as possible. Wind gusts, both natural and those created by large passing vehicles, can move a motorcycle across an entire lane if the rider is not prepared.
- Always dim your headlights when approaching a motorcycle. Because motorcyclists balance as well as steer their vehicles, the blinding effect of your high beams can be far more dangerous to them than to drivers of cars or large commercial trucks.
- Bad weather and slippery roads can present real problems for motorcyclists. Allow even more following distance when it is raining or when the road is slippery.

Montana Motorcycle Rider Safety Training

A motorcycle endorsement is required to operate motorcycles, motor scooters, and three-wheel motorcycles.

At the request of Montana's motorcyclists, the Montana Legislature created the Montana Motorcycle Rider Safety Program. Montana State University-Northern houses and operates Montana Motorcycle Rider Safety as a public service. For information visit their Web site at: <http://www.msun.edu/mt-training.htm>.

